



March 13, 2023

RE: HB 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession

On behalf of the Connecticut Psychological Association (CPA) **I am writing to convey our strong support for HB 6884.** In particular, we would like to convey our support for **Section 11**, which **permits and promotes the use of play-based learning for elementary school children** and an emphasis on free and guided play over the use of mobile electronic devices.

Scientific Evidence

All available psychological research dating back to Jean Piaget, Anna Freud and the seminal work Dr. Edward Zeigler from Yale University demonstrated that play is essential for academic readiness in young children. Current research clearly shows that play is a foundational developmental activity for young children, which directly promotes the cognitive development (including language development, academic readiness, and executive skill development) and the social-emotional development of young children (<https://hechingerreport.org/twenty-six-studies-point-to-more-play-for-young-children/>). Numerous studies have indicated that children derive many benefits and advantages from exposure to play-based learning techniques in nursery school, preschool, and early elementary school education. Recent research points to play being a more effective instructional tool than traditional didactic methods alone, with unique benefits for the acquisition of mathematical and spatial skills (<https://www.edutopia.org/article/young-kids-power-play-based-learning/>).

A large body of scientific evidence indicates that play helps children to understand and make sense of the world around them (<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/articles/play-based-learning-vs-academics-in-preschool>). Play is among the most cost-efficient ways of promoting child development, and provides the foundation for academic readiness and the development of social-emotional skills, including the utilization of imagination and fantasy, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive development. Play-based learning also serves to improve young children's ability to tolerate personal and social frustrations and setbacks (e.g. Lincoln logs/Legos can fall apart, a poem may not always rhyme). Play is a foundational academic skill for all children, and promotes body-activated and experiential learning in young children.

Play is currently underutilized in naturally occurring non-school environments, resulting in children not getting as much exposure to play as would be ideal developmentally. Many psychologists in our community who work with children and in school environments champion the benefits of play and point to the need for increased exposure to play-based learning. Play lets children take chances and safely explore their sense of self and their knowledge of other people, their imagination, develop friendships, learn reciprocal social skills, and follow classroom rules and routines. Every book read to a child (or attempted to be read by a young child) directly promotes pre-academic reading and written language readiness. Lego or Lincoln Logs advance the



STEM readiness of potential STEM scientists. Experts agree that play is essential to child development. Successful play curriculums will likely decrease the need for adverse social-emotional outcomes for children in upper elementary school. Play curriculums for young children will also likely improve the psychological adjustment of young children at a time when youth mental health and wellness is at risk and of critical importance. Play for young children has the potential to be a cost-saving intervention as children will experience improved executive functioning, academic readiness, and social-emotional development. More play can potentially reduce the need for expensive school-based behavioral programs. Put simply, play is great for children and more of it is needed.

Successful play advances the learning (cognitive, academic-readiness and social-emotional) for our youngest children/student learners and will assist in advancing the academic advancement and social-emotional development. Play also increases student engagement and happiness in the school environment. Our youth have experienced unique hardships and developmental setbacks in the era of COVID-19, making evidence-based interventions that promote learning and healthy development more important than ever.

Summary

The Connecticut Psychological Association therefore strongly supports the Proposed Connecticut HB 6884, Section 11. To promote and support increased play-based learning in schools will directly promote the welfare, social-emotional development and the academic readiness of young Connecticut children and increase their likelihood of success as they advance in their academic education. Please do not hesitate to reach out to CPA if we can be of assistance on this or any other initiatives.

Respectfully Submitted,
The Connecticut Psychological Association

Dr. Jennifer Doran, President
Dr. Marcy Russo, Legislative Chair
Dr. Michael Cohen, expert in youth mental health and mental health in schools